

# EBOLA IN BELTON

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Just when you think it's safe...it is

# EBOLA SCARE HITS BELTON, TEXAS

**Oct. 15, 2014**

Belton family agrees to self-isolate for 21 days after it learns a Dallas nurse who later tested positive for Ebola was with them on a recent Frontier Airlines Flight 1143 from Cleveland to Dallas.

Centers for Disease Control determines one of the parents was in a “zone of concern.”



# FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE – OCT. 15, 2014

- Belton ISD and Bell County host combined news conference informing community about the family.
- District initially plans to proceed with normal school schedule for Thursday, Oct. 16. Decision to close three campuses is made later after the CDC unexpectedly reclassifies the status of one of the family members.



# THE FOLLOWING MORNING – OCT. 16, 2014

- With the Bell County Health Administrator out of town, Bell County leaders approach City of Belton about leading future press conferences during the crisis.
- Arrangements are made to inform the media about the change following the second press conference.



# SECOND PRESS CONFERENCE – OCT. 16, 2014

- Belton ISD announces campuses to remain closed an additional day to allow for thorough cleaning.
  - Health officials still evaluating risk to plane passengers
  - Closures made “out of an abundance of caution”



# SECOND PRESS CONFERENCE (CONTINUED)

- Bell County provides update about the Family
  - They are being monitored
  - They are doing well
  - They wish to remain anonymous
  - Child celebrated 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in isolation



# THIRD PRESS CONFERENCE – OCT. 17, 2014

- Voluntary isolation explained
  - Similar to quarantine but voluntary
- Family timeline established
- Protocol explained, if symptoms emerge
- Family passes time with home improvement projects, Netflix, and crafts
- School clean up process explained by sanitation vendor





# OPEN LETTER TO COMMUNITY

- Family releases letter through City of Belton
- It thanks community for outpouring of support
- Letter is shared online by news agencies throughout Texas – goes viral on Facebook & Twitter

## Local family speaks out about Ebola ordeal

Story

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Posted: Friday, October 17, 2014 9:52 pm | Updated: 5:51 pm, Sat Oct 18, 2014.

**Editor's note:** The Belton family that self-isolated following exposure to Ebola patient Amber Vinson asked the Telegram to share with the public this letter. It was sent to the Telegram by Paul Romer, public information officer for the city of Belton:

Belton Community,

We want to thank everyone for their overwhelming support during this ordeal. Our family is staying put and monitoring our temperatures as well as looking for any signs of concern. As we write this statement, our temperatures have been normal and we are experiencing no symptoms. We realize how serious this situation is and want you to know we are dedicated to keeping our fellow citizens safe. We love this community!

With regard to the outpouring of help, we thank each and every one of you for everything you have done for us. We are trying to maintain our family's privacy and make sure that our lives are as normal as possible given the circumstances. Our wish is to avoid any media interaction or attention at this time. We have two children who are the focus of our attention and they have already gone through enough. All of your cards and gifts are being dropped off at designated sites and funds have been set up for us. Please know that we have accepted some of your generous donations and are truly grateful. We do not anticipate needing all of your support and will ensure the remaining funds and items are delivered to deserving charities within our community at the conclusion of our quarantine.

We also would like to thank the Belton Independent School District, Bell County Health Department, Bell County judge, and the Belton Police Department for their continued dedication and support of our family. It is especially gratifying to live in a community that shows its true colors during difficult times and we are blessed to be proud citizens of this town.

Please continue to pray, not only for us, but for all of those who have been, or are affected by this horrible virus. God bless us all!



# ADDITIONAL EFFORTS

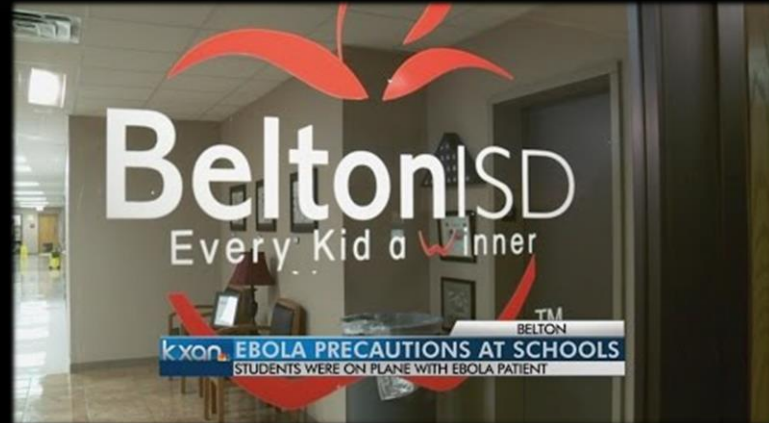
- Scott & White Hospital hosted an Ebola Town Hall Meeting
- Created Ebola Q&A webpage



- In addition to each press conference, Belton ISD sent frequent advisories and letters to keep public informed.

# FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE – OCT. 20, 2014

- Schools re-opened
- On Oct. 16-17, attendance rates at other Belton ISD campuses decreased by up to 20 percent
- District spent \$35,813 to sanitize three schools and multiple buses.
- District announced it would seek an attendance waiver from Texas Education Agency.



# FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE (CONTINUED)

- On Oct. 19, Texas Health Commissioner David Lackey says it is not necessary to close schools or clean buildings or buses due to concerns related to the Ebola virus.
- Local reporter asks about the statement.

*We appreciate his guidance. We would have appreciated it more five days ago, when we were making the decision.*

--Kyle DeBeer, Belton ISD Communication Director

# NOTABLE NEWS AGENCIES THAT COVERED THE STORY

- **Local**

- *Temple Daily Telegram*
- *Killeen Daily Herald*
- *Belton Journal*
- KWTX
- KXXV
- KCEN
- KWKT
- KTEM



- **Statewide/National**

- *Austin American Statesman*
- *Dallas Morning News*
- *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*
- *Houston Chronicle*
- *New York Times*
- *Washington Post*
- CNN
- Fox News

# REMARKABLE AND NOTEWORTHY

- Family remained self isolated for 21 days with no complications, during which time the Belton Police Department delivered cards and other items.
- Using intermediaries the family repeatedly declined interview requests from the media.
- Today the family remains anonymous to most people in the Belton community and beyond.

